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ABSTRACT

This report contains 10 proclamations prepared by adult new readers at a national conference in September 1989. The proclamations are the result of the new readers' deliberations. They represent the viewpoints of adults who have known firsthand the hardships of illiteracy and the triumph of learning to read. Each proclamation consists of a definition of the problem and a number of recommendations. Proclamations were made in the following areas: (1) student leadership within the literacy field; (2) literacy and jobs; (3) mandatory literacy programs in prisons, employment, and welfare; (4) literacy and the family; (5) the transition from basic skills; (6) quality in literacy programs; (7) public awareness and funding; (8) support services to new readers; (9) voting rights and citizenship responsibilities; and (10) English as a second language. (KC)

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Second National Adult Literacy Congress

PROCLAMATIONS FROM ADULT NEW READERS

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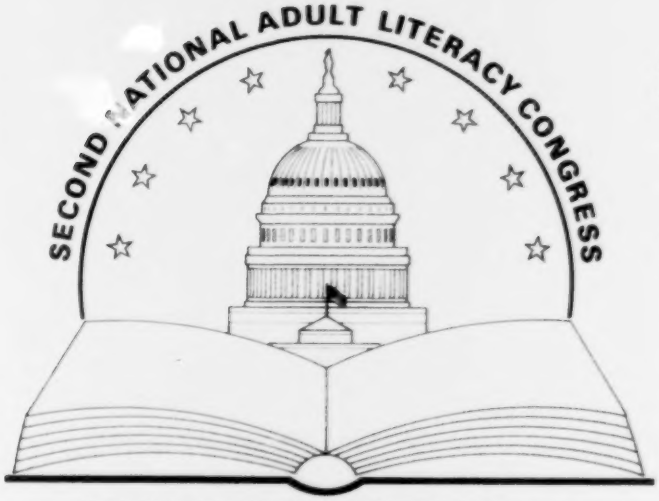

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SEPTEMBER 9-11, 1989 WASHINGTON, D.C.

Ratified September 10, 1989

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THE SECOND NATIONAL ADULT LITERACY CONGRESS

A Forum for New Readers

The Second National Adult Literacy Congress, a gathering of adult new readers from throughout the United States, took place in Washington, D.C. September 9-11, 1989. Eighty new-reader delegates representing 45 states and the District of Columbia attended, including representatives from Laubach Literacy Action and Literacy Volunteers of America, the national volunteer literacy organizations primarily responsible for the event.

The purpose of the congress was to focus national attention on literacy and — more importantly — to address the nation on the issue of literacy from a new reader perspective. These proclamations are the outcome of their deliberations. They represent the viewpoint of adults who have known firsthand the hardships of illiteracy and the triumph of learning to read.

The delegates were welcomed to Washington, D.C. on September 8th, International Literacy Day. The next morning work began. After the opening session, delegates broke into caucus groups, each to discuss one of ten issues of particular importance to adult literacy students. During the day each caucus drafted a proclamation summarizing the day's discussions. These proclamations were voted on in a general session the following morning and formally read to the nation that afternoon from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

On the final day of the congress, delegates visited the White House as guests of First Lady Barbara Bush, honorary chair of the event. Then they took the proclamations to Capitol Hill for meetings with legislators and a final luncheon with legislative leaders and special guest Congressman Thomas Sawyer (D/OH).

From the beginning, the congress was a student initiative. The idea for a national meeting of adult literacy students grew out of discussions between students and staff at the 1986 Laubach Literacy Action Biennial Conference.

As a result of that dialogue, the first National Adult Literacy Congress took place in September 1987. Fifty-one student delegates, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia, gathered in Philadelphia to address the problem of illiteracy and celebrate the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution. The two-day event culminated with a formal ceremony in Congress Hall. Delegates gave unanimous approval to the original proclamations in the presence of national literacy leaders, observers, and government officials.

Many of the student delegates from the first congress returned home to participate in TV, radio and newspaper interviews, as well as talk shows, personal appearances and public service announcements. The state and local publicity surrounding the delegates frequently led not only to increased awareness on the part of the general public, but also to more successful tutor and student recruitment efforts.

Many of the delegates assumed leadership roles in their states. They stimulated the formation of student support groups. And they encouraged students to participate in the activities of local literacy groups and in the political process. Four states (New York, Oklahoma, Vermont, and Indiana) instituted state-level adult literacy student congresses. As a result of the first event, a national network of student leaders emerged to help support learners and stress the positive aspects of the learning to read.

Out of the first congress a unanimous decision was made to convene a second student congress. At the 1988 national conferences of Laubach Literacy Action and Literacy Volunteers of America, student participants from across the United States strongly urged their respective organizational leaders to push forward with plans to hold a second student congress in the fall of 1989 in Washington, D.C.

In addition to Literacy Volunteers of America and Laubach Literacy Action, the Second National Adult Literacy Congress was supported by a new reader committee and a steering committee composed of representatives from United Way of America, the International Reading Association, the Metro Washington Literacy Network, the American Bar Association. These organizations contributed both staff time and resources to ensure the success of the event.

The congress was also supported by the Gannett Foundation, Capital Cities/ABC, Inc., Project Literacy U.S., the Coors Brewing Company, USA Today, AT&T, Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Altrusa International Foundation, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Association of American Publishers.

On behalf of adult new readers, we gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance of United Way of America and the American Bar Association in producing this document.

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SECOND NATIONAL
ADULT LITERACY CONGRESS

LEADERSHIP

Definition of the Problem:

- There is inadequate student leadership within the literacy field in the United States. At the national level, existing student leaders are not sufficiently supported or recognized.

Recommendations:

In order to develop the needed recognition and support, we need to:

1. Prepare national guidelines for student leadership.

2. Provide leadership training for current and former new readers, program staff, and other support organizations. Options include workshops, exchange programs, video tapes, written and telephone communication.

3. Search for, recognize and encourage new readers who can become effective leaders. When necessary, programs need to promote student self-confidence and recognition of their own strengths.

4. Create new roles for student leadership beyond just media appearances. These include board membership, support groups, evaluation of programs, advocacy, fund raising, new reader recruitment, and others.

5. Develop resources targeted for student activities. New readers should have input on budget and policy decisions at all levels.

This Proclamation Was Ratified September 10, 1989

SECOND NATIONAL
ADULT LITERACY CONGRESS

LITERACY AND JOBS

Definition of the Problem:

- Non-readers are afraid to come forward for fear of losing their jobs. The fear of failure and being found out affects every minute of a non-reader's life. This fear inhibits the non-reader's growth on the job.
- If our secret is let out, employers and co-workers may use it against us.
- We are lacking only one skill: literacy. Yet we are treated as if we can't do anything. There is nothing wrong with our brains. Society must take responsibility. Everyone is affected.
- So often, some employers feel that non-readers won't qualify for a particular job or promotion, even though they can do the work.
- Many trade schools exploit new readers.
- New readers don't know their rights in the work place.

Recommendations:

1. New readers need protection and encouragement to come forward without fear of losing their jobs.

2. Employers and unions should help in providing new readers with support.

3. We recommend that federal and state governments make tax breaks available to employers that have education programs for new readers.

4. We recommend that employers bring in literacy programs instead of replacing non-readers. The value of their experience outweighs the training costs.

5. We recommend that literacy providers assist new readers in investigating trade schools before enrolling.

6. We recommend that non-readers and new readers be made aware of their rights in the work place.

7. A non-reader should have the opportunity for assistance in taking job tests. Job tests measure your reading ability, not your knowledge of the job.

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SECOND NATIONAL
ADULT LITERACY CONGRESS

MANDATORY LITERACY IN PRISONS, EMPLOYMENT AND WELFARE

Definition of the Problem:

- Mandatory literacy programs are being implemented in prison systems, in the workplace and in welfare programs. These literacy programs pose the danger of infringements upon individual rights, may undermine the learning process and the new reader's self confidence and require a substantial increase in resources. Are these mandatory literacy programs a good idea?

Recommendations:

We believe that literacy enhances self-esteem, stabilizes family life and improves job skills. We believe that some people who would not seek help on their own would participate in literacy programs if required. Therefore, we recommend the following:

I. Prisons

A. Federal, state and local prisons and jails should be required to provide basic literacy programs to all inmates.

B. Inmates should be given incentives to participate in literacy programs if their reading skills are below the eighth grade level.

C. Inmates with good reading skills should be encouraged to tutor other inmates.

II. Employment

A. Employers may take steps to find out if their employees can read, but should keep that information confidential.

B. Employees should not be fired because they cannot read.

C. Employers may require employees to enroll in a literacy program as a condition of continued employment or promotion. Employers should provide such programs if they are not already available.

D. Employers should not require, but should encourage, reading skills beyond the level required by the employee's job.

E. Employers should be encouraged to provide literacy program information and referral to all prospective employees who could benefit from them.

III. Welfare

A. All welfare recipients with poor reading skills should be given incentives to participate in literacy programs to better prepare them for job training.

B. Federal and state governments should ensure that such literacy programs are available.

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LITERACY AND THE FAMILY

Definition of the Problem:

- We, the people of the United States, agree that the family is the very backbone of the nation and that illiteracy is undermining the family.

- We, the new readers, have found the following problems in our families:

stopping illiteracy continuing from generation to generation; poor self-image creating a vicious cycle leading to problems like drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and high drop-out rates; shame dividing families; learning to read changes dependency relationships in families; taking time away from the family while in a literacy program.

Recommendations:

1. Build awareness of the problems illiteracy causes in a family by increasing the use of media to develop videos, new readers' columns in newspapers, etc.

2. Literacy providers should train tutors to be aware of family issues which may occur and to be prepared to provide referrals.

3. Provide counseling for the new readers, spouses, and families.

4. Start programs to have new readers speak in schools, share their success stories and serve as role models.

5. Create literacy tutoring programs for children to help break the cycle of family illiteracy. Conduct early reading testing to identify children to be in those programs.

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THE TRANSITION FROM BASIC SKILLS

Definition of the Problem:

There are many facets to the problem:

- fear of failure and low self esteem
- negative past experiences
- lack of information on the part of both tutors and students
- financial aid
- lack of cooperation between the volunteer system and the educational system
- lack of knowledge about illiteracy within the workplace

Recommendations:

1. Better peer counseling and stronger student support groups, together with learning to capitalize on past successes, should help address the problems of low self esteem and fear of failure.

2. Putting your past behind you and learning from your mistakes are important steps toward making the transition.

3. The problem of lack of information should be addressed in several ways:

a) tutors must be well informed about available programs and/or educational opportunities beyond the basics; b) students need periodic evaluation and feedback; c) curriculum must be more related to "real life situations" like how to fill out applications and forms.

4. Counseling in financial aid options should be made available to volunteer programs for students.

5. Educational equipment in the school system should be made available to volunteer programs. There is a need for counseling on and support for options available for further education. For example, bridging the gap between one-on-one tutoring and GED instruction, GED and/or vocational training and community college.

6. Industry should work with literacy programs in their communities.

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QUALITY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Definition of the Problem:

- Without proper support, training, and resources, local programs cannot deliver services, especially with increased demand and greater public awareness.

Recommendations:

We, as adult learners, see the need for quality literacy programs. Our recommendations include the following:

1) Active and on-going recruitment of students must contain a positive and sensitive initial interview. Students must be treated with respect and made aware of their options for involvement. More accurate referral systems are needed for proper placement. Hearing, vision, speech and learning disability screening must be made available as part of the educational evaluation.

2) Strong program management must focus on student-tutor relationships. Effective tutor training includes initial and inservice sessions, flexibility and variety in instructional methods, awareness of and sensitivity to students needs and student involvement in the training process. Effective and consistent follow-up and support of the learning partners should include a measurable evaluation on a periodic basis. Students must be included in program policy and development.

3) In the public relations area, student involvement in all aspects of literacy program promotion to the community is essential.

4) Increased financial support is imperative in order to ensure quality literacy programs.

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MOVING US FORWARD: PUBLIC AWARENESS AND FUNDING

Definition of the Problem:

- The public is not aware of the scope and the depth of the problem of adult illiteracy and its long reaching impact on individuals, families, communities, and the nation. This has led to a lack of funding.

Recommendations:

1. Funding is needed to increase public awareness.

We, the adult new readers, will continue to speak out and talk about the pain and struggles caused by our not being able to read. We will carry our message to professionals, education, potential tutors and students, lawmakers, business people and government officials.

2. Funding is need to provide adult new readers with transportation, child care, information and other support services to continue educational opportunities.

We, the adult new readers, will lobby local, state and federal legislatures and the business community.

3. Funding is needed to provide program administrative support services, such as a paid coordinator, and materials, supplies and equipment such as computers and books.

We, the adult new readers will lobby local, state and federal legislatures.

4. Funding should come from a variety of sources:

-Student fundraising activities
-Government
-Business
-Community organizations
-Individuals

We, the adult new readers will raise the public awareness of the need for this money.

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SUPPORT SERVICES TO NEW READERS

Definition of the Problem:

- New readers often face many social, economic, and personal barriers. These include not having enough funds, personal and family problems, and limited information about where they can get help. Also, the system itself sometimes does not work for new readers. Literacy programs are often not held at times or places that are convenient to new readers. Social service systems that ought to cooperate often do not work together. Finally, tutors do not have the support they need in order to provide quality service.

Recommendations:

1. Create funding for new readers and literacy programs to cover the costs of support services.

2. Increase the quality of literacy programs by paying more attention to the student and tutor match, providing better pay to staff, better support to tutors and new approaches to learning that address the complex needs of adult.

3. Educate employers about the benefits of literacy. This will encourage them to give new readers time during work hours and space at work to learn.

4. Educate the entire community about the importance of working together to provide a variety of opportunities, locations, and services, especially opening public schools and libraries at night.

5. Provide child care to students and tutors.

6. Provide personal and family counseling, screening for vision, hearing, learning disabilities, and treatment for substance abuse to ensure success for new readers.

7. Establish student support groups. They are very important to new readers' growth and are worth the effort. They allow new readers to bond, open up, and learn.

8. Use new readers to recruit non-readers. New readers are role models and they understand the barriers that non-readers face. With the support of new readers, the literacy movement is empowered.

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VOTING RIGHTS AND CITIZENSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

Definition of the Problem:

- Access to voting has not been available to everyone.

  Historically, voter participation has been limited on the basis of property ownership, gender, race, education and income. The literacy barrier is one of the last to fall and has frequently been used to deny voting rights in the United States.

- New readers sometimes deny themselves voting rights due to fear of making mistakes, feeling dumb and wanting to vote responsibly.

  New readers want to do more than go through the voting motions. We have not had enough knowledge and practice with the party system, candidates, the registration process, or the steps in voting. The result is that we have felt left out of the community.

- There are lots of ways to participate as a citizen and voting seems to be the first step.

  Literacy is knowledge: knowledge is power.

Recommendations:

1. More options for group discussions and group support of new readers as regular parts of literacy program. Greater group experience will bring new readers out of isolation and allow them to move from "I" to "We". This is the beginning of community.

2. More new reader participation in running their own programs in leadership and management is needed in order to gain practice and a feel for the political process.

3. Curriculum content should include field trips, information on mechanics of voting, including rights, balloting, how to find information on voting issues, plus

discussion of issues themselves and the history of voting rights (what groups have been excluded and why and how).

4. Local literacy programs should actively urge that the voting process be made easier and more convenient. This would include rewriting election notices into more simplified and clearer language, public service announcements, and encouraging greater knowledge of the voting process in the whole community.

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SECOND NATIONAL
ADULT LITERACY CONGRESS

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Definition of the Problem:

- The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) granted Temporary Resident Status to approximately 1.5 million formerly illegal aliens. An estimated 975,000 of these Temporary Residents will have to complete an ESL/Citizenship Course of instruction which is approved by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). What will happen to those legalized aliens with Temporary Status who cannot enroll in an approved ESL/Citizenship course during the 12 month period they have been given?

Recommendations:

1. Congress and the INS should allow more time to qualify for Permanent Resident Status. In many cases twelve months is simply not enough, because courses of instruction are not available.

2. Congress and the INS should consider whether it is practical to require qualification for Permanent Status at all.

3. All local ESL/Citizenship instruction providers (Adult Basic Education, Volunteers, and Private) should meet with regional INS officials to consider the number of people needing instruction under the IRCA guidelines versus the availability of classroom space in the local area. Courses should be provided where there are none.

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